THE BUDDHA AS A HISTORICAL PERSON*

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In the issue of 2017 of this journal David Drewes published his lecture read at the XVII[th] IABS Conference in Vienna in 2014 under the title "The Idea of the Historical Buddha" in which he claims that the Buddha is not a historical person, because

> more than two centuries of scholarship have failed to establish anything about him. We are thus left with the rather strange proposition that Buddhism was founded by a historical figure who has not been linked to any historical facts, an idea that would seem decidedly unempirical, and only dubiously coherent (Drewes 2017: 1).

What follows is a very clear and useful survey of research, or rather part of the research on the person of the Buddha, or, perhaps still more precisely of opinions on his historical reality. For in a very modern though somewhat unfortunate way, D. Drewes talks only about what people thought without quoting a single Buddhist text or going back to any other sources. At the end, in some sort of silent democracy, he decides that following a majority of those scholars quoted who in his opinion failed to produce anything concrete about the Buddha that he never lived.

Interestingly, it seems to have escaped D. Drewes that particularly those scholars who lived at an early date of European research on Buddhism and consequently had only limited if any access to old and original sources, were most sceptical about the Buddha, while later or more recent

* This article is based on a paper read at the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University, Hachioji, on 25[th] August 2018 and at Stanford University on 7[th] February 2019. — It is my pleasant obligation to thank N. Balbir, Paris, for drawing my attention to Faure 2018, who rightly denies the feasibility of writing a comprehensive biography of the historical Buddha, which is due to the dearth of material. This, however, is a very different problem with no bearing on the question of his historicity. The book came to my knowledge too late to be used for the present article.

Buddhologists like Étienne Lamotte (1903–1983), who is quoted, or A. Foucher (1865–1952)[1] and J. W. de Jong (1921–2000),[2] who are not, were more and more convinced of his historicity.

It also escaped D. Drewes that historians of ancient India are very confident about the historicity of the Buddha. Consequently the question of his historicity was not even raised during the symposium called "The Dating of the *Historical* Buddha" (my emphasis) held in Hedemünden near Göttingen in 1988 and edited by H. Bechert (1932–2005).[3] The reason is easy to see. The nirvāṇa of the Buddha is dated, and this connects him not only to his contemporary and rival Mahāvīra but also to quite a few kings. This date is a stark contrast to mythological figures from the west such as Agamemnon in the Iliad or Vyāsa and Vālmīki in the east, who are compared to the Buddha by D. Drewes. However, no historian on India is quoted; this aspect of the problem simply seems to have been overlooked.

As D. Drewes argues in a rather abstract way by referring only to the history of research, it may be worthwhile to go back to the sources, and to have a closer look at some details. This implies, of course, that much of what follows is not necessarily very new and much has been said before, particularly in É. Lamotte's excellent survey (duly quoted by D. Drewes) on the development on research on the life of the Buddha and particularly on the development of the Buddha legend.[4] Moreover, it is not intended to give a comprehensive survey of all sources mentioning details of the Buddha's life. For the present purposes it is sufficient and necessary to mainly focus primarily on Theravāda texts, because they are

[1] Foucher [1949] 1987, reviewed in *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology* XVI (1948–1953), no. 2524 & XVII (1954–1957), no. 1387. An abbreviated English version by Simone Brangier Boas appeared under the title *The Life of the Buddha According to the Ancient Texts and Monuments of India* in 1963 (reprinted in 1972 and 2003); cf. also v. Hinüber 2009 [2019].

[2] De Jong 1974 [1994] is not quoted by Drewes.

[3] Bechert 1991, reviewed by Narain (1993), Gombrich (1994), de Jong (1994), Cousins (1996), Fussman (1996), Wurm (1998), and Ruegg (1999). "The Dating of the Historical Buddha" is not quoted by Drewes. – In the same way the problem of the historicity of the Buddha is not discussed in Cüppers, Deeg and Durt 2010, reviewed by v. Hinüber (2014).

[4] Lamotte 1948. – A very concise and precise summary of the problem is also given by J. Filliozat (1906–1982) in Renou and Filliozat [1947–1953] 1985: §§ 2170–2177.

preserved in the original Indic language. This allows using the linguistic evidence, which is crucial but necessarily lost in translations which show at the Indian originals only in a "distant mirror."[5]

The first question to be asked when searching for information on the life of the Buddha is obviously: How old are the extant sources? Or, otherwise put, how far back do attempts to approach the time of the Buddha as closely as possible reach? The answer to both these questions can either establish a likely historicity of the Buddha, or at the very least a date at which he was "invented." Neither question is asked in D. Drewes' article.

Any attempt to establish the historicity of the Buddha requires an early date of the sources rather near to the Buddha himself, while the likelihood of an "invented" Buddha grows with an increasing distance in time from the supposed date of his life time. For, only after all possible memory on the Buddha – if he was a historical person – was lost, and after all his contemporaries and their immediate descendants (real or imagined) were dead, would fantasy be able to run free.

To begin with, the doubts about the historicity of the Buddha are much older than evident from the material assembled by D. Drewes. For, already King Milinda asks the Thera Nāgasena twice, once in the older and once in the younger part of the *Milindapañha*,[6] whether the Buddha existed or not. The older paragraph reads:

> *Rājā āha bhante nāgasena, buddho tayā diṭṭho ti? – na hi, mahārājā ti. – atha te ācariyehi buddho diṭṭho ti? – na hi, mahārājā ti. – tena hi, bhante nāgasena, natthi buddho ti. – kiṃ pana, mahārāja, Himavati Ūhā nadī tayā diṭṭhā ti? – na hi, bhante ti. – atha te pitarā Ūhā nadī diṭṭhā ti? – na hi, bhante ti. – tena hi, mahārāja, natthi Ūhā nadīti. – atthi, bhante, kiñcāpi mayā Ūhā nadī na diṭṭhā, pitarā pi me Ūhā nadī na diṭṭhā, api ca atthi Ūhā nadī ti. – evam eva kho, mahārāja, kiñcāpi mayā bhagavā na diṭṭho, ācariyehi pi me bhagavā na diṭṭho, api ca atthi bhagavā ti. – kallo si, bhante nāgasenā''ti*, Mil 70,5–16.
>
> The King said: Revered Nāgasena, have you seen the Buddha? – No, sire. – Then have your teachers seen the Buddha? – No, sire. – Well then, revered Nāgasena, there is no Buddha. – But have you seen the river Ūhā

[5] Thus Nattier 2003: 72: "A Distant Mirror: Studying Indian Buddhism through Chinese and Tibetan Texts."

[6] HPL § 172–179, where editions and translations quoted in the following are listed.

> in the Himalayas? – No, revered sir. – Then has your father seen it? – No, revered sir. – Then there is no river Ūhā. – There is, revered sir. Although neither my father nor I have seen the river Ūhā, nevertheless there is a river Ūhā. – In the same way, though neither my teachers nor I have seen the Lord, nevertheless there is a Lord. – You are dexterous, revered Nāgasena. (I. B. Horner)

The discussion in the later part of the *Milindapañha* is much longer, but follows the same slightly naïve pattern. Neither has Milinda seen his Kṣatriya forefathers or their instructors nor have Nāgasena or his teachers seen the Buddha. Still, there are utensils extant that were used by the former Kṣatriya such as swords, turbans or sandals. Similarly there are the teachings left by the Buddha such as the eightfold noble path or the seven *bojjhaṅga*s (Mil 329,9–330,14 = I. B. Horner 1963–1964 II 169ff.).

Here, the *Milindapañha* is certainly right: We do see the teaching of the Buddha, and, consequently, somebody must have created these texts. For the very existence of this vast literature points to a person or a number of persons who composed it. Consequently, the question arises as to how and where traces of this person or these persons, perhaps including those of a historical person who can be called the Buddha, can be found. This question also requires another look into a problem that has been much debated since the beginning of research on Buddhism: how far is it possible to separate historical facts from fiction in ancient Buddhist texts, which are of course overgrown by mythology?

First, the traditional biographies of the Buddha could be consulted. The earliest coherent biography of the Buddha extant is of course Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*.[7] This, however, is already separated from the Buddha's lifetime by perhaps almost half a millennium and therefore unsuitable as a source on the historicity of the Buddha. On the other hand, biographies of the Buddha written by Western (and perhaps also Eastern)[8] scholars

[7] Cf. Salomon 2015, particularly pp. 510ff. A short life of the Buddha in simple verses, which could be approximately contemporary to Aśvaghoṣa, was introduced by R. Salomon: A Previously Unknown Biography of the Buddha in Gāndhārī at the 17th World Sanskrit Conference held at Vancouver in 2018. – On ancient Chinese literature on the life of the Buddha cf. Durt 2006; cf. also Faure 2018.

[8] Such as Hirakawa [1990] 2007, chapter 2: Life of the Buddha (Hirakawa does not question the historicity of the Buddha). Other works by Japanese scholars on the life of

do not help, because they try from the very outset to reconstruct the life of the Buddha as completely as possible, and for this purpose they usually assemble a large variety of sources irrespective of the fact that they may date to different periods.

Thus the problem that emerges first, once the historicity of the Buddha is investigated, is to go back beyond Aśvaghoṣa and to find sources that pre-date his *Buddhacarita*. For obviously much hinges on the date of the extant sources while their exact place of origin is of much less consequence. Therefore, first of all the texts assembled in the Tripiṭaka are important, supplemented of course by early inscriptions.

On the other hand, there are no archaeological traces which can be used.[9] Certainly, there are the remains of the cities which the Buddha is supposed to have visited, such as Vaiśālī, Rājagṛha, or Kapilavastu. But their existence tells nothing about the people including the Buddha who inhabited them in ancient times. This leaves us with the relics.[10] There is the Piprahwa reliquary, or the tooth relic in Kandy in Ceylon, and others. Modern scientific methods might even prove (or more likely disprove) their high age. Even if any relics could be dated to the time which is usually assumed as that of the Buddha, particularly after the Hedemünden conference mentioned above, that is to say to about 380 BC, it would again be impossible to attribute these remains to the Buddha himself: they could be those of any person living at the time. However, if some of the relics should prove to have been collected at the time when the Buddha is supposed to have lived, this would also prove that already at this early date remains of holy persons were preserved and venerated. This would be not only a very valuable result in itself, but it would also

the Buddha are listed in Nakamura 1980 [reviewed by McDermott 1982 and v. Hinüber 1984, columns 595 ff.]: 16, n. 1.

[9] The latest attempt to approach the Buddha by means of archaeology is Coningham et al. 2013. These excavations obviously brought to light vestiges of pre-Buddhist tree worship at the place where the Bodhisatva is supposed to have been born. This is of particular interest in the light of the images of the birth of Bodhisatva while his mother was standing under a tree and of the presentation of the newly born child to a tree deity as shown, e.g., at Kanaganahalli: Poonacha 2013: plate LXXXVIIA; on the inscription: Nakanishi and v. Hinüber 2014: 92, no. III.2,4. – On tree worship at Lumbini cf. also Bareau [1987] 1995 [reviewed by de Jong 1998: 393–397], particularly p. 11.

[10] For a survey see, e.g., Strong 2004.

give additional credibility to the report of the Buddha's cremation in the *Mahāparinibbāṇasuttanta*. Thus, relics might help to support the historicity of the Buddha in an indirect way, presupposed their age is right.[11]

When confronting the written sources, the two basic problems are of course: How and where are literary or epigraphical texts found which are as early as possible, and how can they be recognized? The best possible source would be an old and dated inscription. However, at the time of the Buddha there was no script, so nothing written can be traced back to his time. Still, there is a dated inscription referring directly to the life of the Buddha engraved as soon as script was invented and introduced at the time of Aśoka.[12]

When Aśoka was king for twenty years (*vīsativasābhisitena*), he went to the village of Luṃmini (*luṃminigāme*) and had a column erected (*silāthabe ca usapāpite*) bearing the inscription *hida budhe jate sakyamunīti* "here, a Buddha was born, the wise Śākya" and *hida bhagavaṃ jāte ti* "here the Lord was born." Both wordings, which are marked as quotations and used in the same inscription,[13] at once recall the famous paragraph from the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* where four eminent places of pilgrimage are enumerated, among them the Buddha's birth place. The wording used in the Tipiṭaka (*idha tathāgato jāto*, DN II 140,20) is very similar to the inscription. If Aśoka reigned approximately between 270 and 235 BC, his inscription proves that by 250 BC Lumbini was indeed considered as the birth place of the Buddha and consequently the Buddha was taken as historical person, as is also evident from other inscriptions of Aśoka.[14]

[11] Buddhist piety (and the fear that the relics might prove not to be genuine) would most likely, and perhaps rightly, prevent such an investigation of extant relics from the outset, which, whatever the results, would most likely do more harm than good. From a pious Buddhist view, the date of relics as such is rather irrelevant anyway; it may even be irrelevant whether they are genuine or not, if an anecdote which is quoted as "well-known" without source by Conze (1956: 76) is considered.

[12] The latest of the many articles on the introduction of script in ancient India is the survey by Falk (2018).

[13] Cf., e.g., Bloch [1950] 2007: 157.

[14] Bairāṭ-Calcutta (Bhābrā), Bloch [1950] 2007: 154: *e keci bhaṃte bhagavatā budhena bhāsite save se subhāsite vā* "Whatever, venerable sir, the Venerable Lord Buddha said, all that is well spoken."

The Lumbini inscription concurs with the Asita story embedded in the introduction to the *Nāḷakasuttanta* of the *Suttanipāta*: *so bodhisatto … jāto / sakyānaṃ gāme janapade lumbineyye*, Sn 683 "the Bodhisatta … has been born … in a village of the Sakyans, in the Lumbini country" (after K. R. Norman 2001).[15] The same information is contained in the *Kathāvatthu*, a text which is believed by tradition to have been composed by Moggaliputtatissa during the time of Aśoka.[16] This evidence demonstrates that the Buddha was considered a historical person less than 150 years after the assumed date of his death, or alternatively had been invented by this time.

More information on the Buddha's life is preserved in the *Dīghanikāya*. Following the well-known enumeration of the predecessors of the Buddha (DN II 2,15–28), various details of the life of each individual Buddha such as their *jāti*s or their *gotta*s as well as their age and parents are communicated. The life-span starts with 80,000 years for the Buddha Vipassin dwindling down to 20,000 years for Kassapa. The age of the Buddha Gotama is of particular interest: "Now, my lifespan, monks, is small, brief, short. Who lives long, (lives) a century more or less" (*mayhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi appakaṃ āyuppamāṇaṃ parittaṃ lahusaṃ. yo ciraṃ jīvati so vassasataṃ appaṃ vā bhiyyo*, DN II 4,3–5). This text is supposed to have been spoken by the Buddha while he was still alive. Therefore his age is not given, although, as an omniscient Buddha[17] he should have known that he would die at the age of about eighty as mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* shortly before the his death (*ahaṃ … jiṇṇo vuddho mahallako … asītiko me vayo vattati*, DN II 100,13). This information is supported by a verse also from the same

[15] This verse is echoed in the much later *Apadāna*: *pacchime ca bhave dāni*, *ramme kapilavatthave / jāto mahāmaccakule*, *suddhodanamahīpate // yadā ajāyi siddhattho*, *ramme lumbinikānane / hitāya sabbalokassa*, *sukhāya ca narāsabho*; *Apadāna* 501,17*–21*.

[16] Cf. HPL § 144 and Willemen, Dessein and Cox 1998 (reviewed by Delhey 1999: 561–563; Werner 1999: 339 ff.; Verpoorten 1999/2000: 674–677; v. Hinüber 2002: 272–275 = v. Hinüber 2009–19: 942–945; Gethin 2003: 93–97): 58ff., where various opinions on the date of Kv are discussed; *Lumbiniyā bhagavā jāto*, *bodhiyā mūle abhisambuddho*, *bārāṇasiyaṃ bhagavatā dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ*, Kv 97,2ff.

[17] If the strategy of a story requires so, the Buddha's omniscience is set aside; cf. Silk 2003.

text: "At the age of twenty-nine, Subhadda, I left home seeking for what leads to salvation. It is more or less fifty years that I left home, Subhadda" (*ekūnatiṃso vayasā Subhadda* / *yaṃ pabbajiṃ kiṃkusalānuesī* // *vassāni paññāsa samādhikāni*[18] / *yato ahaṃ pabbajito Subhadda*, DN II 151,25*–29*). At the same time this verse indicates that the "eighty years" are meant to be a round figure. Realistic details like these concerning the age of the Buddha are hardly expected in the hagiography of a mythological person.

Moreover, the name of the Buddha's father is mentioned as Suddhodana in the *Nāḷakasuttanta* of the *Suttanipāta* (Sn 685), which is corroborated by the *Mahāpadānasuttanta* (*mayhaṃ … Suddhodano nāma rājā pitā ahosi*, DN II 7,27). He resides, of course, in Kapilavatthu. The name of the Buddha's mother is given as *māyādevī mātā janettī*, DN II 7,28. Māyā, however, does not occur as a name elsewhere and is originally not a personal name, but an eastern form developing out of *mātādevī* meaning "the royal mother."[19] This was not and could not be understood, by the redactors, creating this wording in a western language (Pāli).[20] Thus the name of the Buddha's mother remains unknown and that of his wife appears in old texts only as Rāhulamātā (Bareau [1982] 1995), a form that the Bodhisatva would have used most likely himself before his departure from home.

In the second part of the *Mahāpadānasuttanta* (DN II 11,11–50,2) the life of the first Buddha Vipassin is described in detail and serves as the model for the biography of all Buddhas. It is not clear whether a purely mythological model influenced later descriptions of the

[18] *samādhika* occurs only in this verse in canonical Pāli. It is explained in the CPD s.v. *adhika* as metrical lengthening of *sam-adhika* perhaps following the commentary on *samādhikānī* (Ja II 383,6*) *ti sama-adhikāni*, Ja II 383,14'. Another possible segmentation would be *samā-adhikāni* "(fifty years) with an additional year." This would add up to exactly eighty years. However, compounds of this type, though frequent in the post-canonical language, are otherwise alien to the Tipiṭaka.

[19] Cf. *Rāhulamātā devī*, Vin I, 82,8.

[20] v. Hinüber 1994: 13. – The loss of the name of the mother was perhaps favoured by a custom similar to present day usage that married couples traditionally do not address each other by each other's personal names in India. In particular, it is strictly forbidden for the wife to use the name of her husband, while the husband usually would use "mother of" followed by the name of his son; cf. Crooke [1906] 1972: 344.

biography of the Buddha Gotama or whether, the other way round, some facts preserved from the life of a historical Buddha were incorporated into the mythological account.

Two points among all the many mythological embellishments are worth noticing here: The mother of a Buddha gives birth while standing,[21] and she dies seven days later (DN II 14,3ff.; 12–14).

Furthermore, this model life does not contain any hint at the nirvāṇa or at events surrounding the nirvāṇa of Vipassin. Nothing that presupposes the Buddha's death is mentioned. This observation can be interpreted in two ways. Either the story is so old that it was told while the Buddha was still alive, which would explain the missing age and the missing nirvāṇa; or much more likely, a later redactor could have easily adjusted the story and shaped it in such a way as it would have been told by the Buddha himself before his nirvāṇa. No decision is possible between these two sides of the alternative. This passage contains nothing that could be used for tracing events during the Buddha's life time.

More interesting is the remark that the mother of a Bodhisatva dies seven days after giving birth to her child (DN II 14,3–5).[22] This is said in a context emphasizing the purity of the Bodhisatva's birth (DN II 14,23–26). The meaning of this emphasis on purity has been pointed out by M. Hara in his article "A Note on the Buddha's Birth Story" (Hara 1980), where he examines corresponding accounts from an Indian perspective by comparing Hindu sources from epics and purāṇas. M. Hara also recalls that the Bodhisatva neither enters the side of his mother's womb as an elephant, nor is he born in an unnatural way in the *Dīgha-nikāya* as he is in later Sanskrit sources, leaving the womb through the right side of his mother.[23]

An indication of a comparatively high age of the content of this description (not necessarily in the extant wording) is the missing dream of the Bodhisatva's mother, which can be traced back to an image at Bhārhut, that is to the second century BCE, before it intrudes into the

[21] No tree is mentioned here. Following the *Buddhacarita*, Māyādevī gave birth lying down: *śayyāṃ prapede*, Buddha-c I 8.

[22] The stepmother of the Buddha, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, is not mentioned in this paragraph.

[23] *pārśvāt suto … jajñe*, Buddha-c I 9.

world of extant Buddhist texts, as observed by A. Foucher ([1949] 1987: 37ff.).

Thus, the description of conception and birth, though of course involving gods, is on the whole still fairly sober. Therefore, one might be inclined to take this as an indication that the death of the Bodhisatva's mother is historical memory; all the more so, because death after child birth certainly was as common in ancient India as elsewhere in the ancient world. However, when the Buddha recalls his departure from home to become an ascetic, his parents are still alive (see below). Consequently it is likely, particularly in a context emphasizing purity, that the idea of the early death of the Buddha's mother must be regarded as a protection of her purity, as the commentary already correctly states, and does not necessarily contain genuine memory.[24]

Genuine memory, however, if it can be found at all, may be contained in a few casual remarks about his biography ascribed to the Buddha himself.[25] These remarks are usually made in contexts which have no relation at all to a coherent story of the life of the Buddha. Moreover, they refer to natural events without any mythological component in them, and, most important, are partly not in accordance with and may even contradict to what is said in later biographies. As "inventing" contradictions at a later date does not make much if any sense, they might go back to the time of the Buddha and as such might even contain the memory of a genuine person.[26]

Remarks relating to the biography of the Buddha are extremely rare. If they are arranged in chronological order the first event remembered by

[24] *kālaṃ karontīti na vijāyanabhāvapaccayā*, *āyuparikkhayen' eva*. *bodhisattena vasitaṭṭhānaṃ hi cetiyakuṭisadisaṃ hoti*, *aññesaṃ aparibhogārahaṃ*, Sv 436,32–34. "She does not die as a result of giving birth, but only because of the exhaustion of her lifespan. For any place in which a Bodhisatva has resided is like a *cetiyakuṭi* and must not be used by others." The purity of the Bodhisatva's mother after conception is already emphasized in the *Acchariyabbhutadhammasuttanta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, MN III 118–124, where neither Māyādevī's dream nor any unnatural birth are mentioned.

[25] Recollections of the time before enlightenment mostly concern matters of the teaching. They are usually introduced by the formula: *pubbe ca me bhikkhave sambodhā anabhisaṃbuddhass'eva sato etad ahosi*, MN I 17,6; AN I 258,34; III 82,12 etc.

[26] Cf. the pertinent methodological remarks in Nattier 2003: 63–70, which also apply here, although the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* is not a normative text.

the Buddha would be the so-called first meditation. In the *Mahāsaccakasuttanta* (*Majjhimanikāya* 36), the Buddha converses with the Jain Saccaka near Vesālī. After describing his extreme austerities the Buddha states that he had to admit to himself that his fasting almost until death did not bring him any nearer to a superhuman state (*uttariṃmanussadhamma*, MN I 246,29). Then it occurred to him "perhaps there is a different way leading to enlightenment" (*siyā nu kho añño maggo bodhāya*, MN I 246,30). At this crucial turning point in his quest for enlightenment the Bodhisatva remembers an event in his youth, which is described in only a few lines in spite of its importance: "I recall that while my father the Sakka was working, as I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree … I entered and abided in the first joyful of stage of meditation. Could that be the path to enlightenment? Then, following on that memory, Aggivessana, came the insight: Exactly that is the path to enlightenment" (after Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*abhijānāmi kho panāhaṃ pitu sakkassa kammante sītāya jambucchāyāya nisinno … pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharitā. siyā nu kho eso maggo bodhāya. tassa mayhaṃ Aggivessana satānusārī viññāṇaṃ ahosi*: *eso va maggo bodhāyāti*, MN I 246,31–35). The relevant point when trying to trace historical memory is that the scene described recalls a simple peasant working. For the fact that the Bodhisatva's father, whose name Suddhodana is very appropriate for a farmer and much less for a king, works in a field is of course in stark contrast to the belief of later Buddhists that Suddhodana was a king. Consequently the commentary skilfully assumes a ceremonial ploughing with a golden plough being used by a king surrounded by numerous ministers etc. in order to eliminate this glaring contradiction (*vappamaṅgaladivaso … suvaṇṇanaṅgalaṃ*, Ps II 290,13.31), while the prince sat in the shade of a tree that did not move with the sun.[27] Buddhaghosa's explanation is obviously a far cry from what the text says. This demonstrates how unacceptable this plain story was at a time when the Buddha had developed into a superhuman being.

[27] *sesarukkhānaṃ chāyā nivattā, tassa pana jamburukkhassa parimaṇḍalā hutvā aṭṭhāsi*, Ps II 291,4ff. "the shade of other trees moved, but the one of that Jambu tree was circular and immovable."

The discrepancy between text and interpretation points to an old and genuine memory of a living person, particularly the casual remark *pitu sakkassa kammante*. While the commentary invented a slightly fantastic explanation, the sober canonical text is free from all miracles and could be very close to reality.[28]

Another point is that the Bodhisatva was protected from the heat by the shade of a Jambu tree. The choice of this tree is interesting, because the Bodhisatva later reached enlightenment under an Aśvattha tree.[29] If this episode was a late invention, an Aśvattha tree would have been an obvious choice foreshadowing enlightenment.

A second contradiction to later traditions is found in the description of the Bodhisatva leaving home. In the later standard biographies he leaves his wife and his palace at night without anybody noticing his departure. Only at a certain distance from Kapilavastu does the Bodhisatva exchange his royal clothes for an ascetic garb.

An obviously much earlier version of this story told in the *Ariyapari-yesanasuttanta* (*Majjhimanikāya* 26)[30] is quite different. Here the Buddha remembers and communicates the respective details of his earlier life in a markedly different way. His parents were crying while they witnessed his departure, as the Bodhisatva obviously puts on his ascetic garb at home before leaving: "Later, monks, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessings of youth, in the prime of life, though my parents wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I removed my hair and beard, put on a yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness" (after Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*so kho ahaṃ bhikkhave aparena samyena daharo va samāno susu kāḷakeso*[31] *bhadrena*

[28] This episode has been discussed by Horsch (1964), Durt (1982), and Schlingloff (1987).

[29] *ahaṃ … assatthassa mūle abhisaṃbuddho*, DN II 4,17 "I was enlightened under an Aśavattha (tree)."

[30] Cf. also 95 *Caṅkīsuttanta* MN II 166,29–32.

[31] The commentary explains: *daharo va samāno ti taruṇo va samāno. susukāḷakeso ti suṭṭhu kāḷakeso*, Ps II 170,29. However, the explanation on the parallel wording *daharo tvaṃ bhikkhu*, *pabbajito susu kāḷakeso*, *bhaddena yobbanena samannāgato*, SN I 9,5 differs by correctly taking *susu* as an equivalent of Sanskrit *śiśu*:… *daharo tvan ti-ādim āha. tattha susū ti taruṇo. kāḷakeso ti suṭṭhu kāḷakeso. bhadrenāti bhaddakena*, Spk I 42,5. – Parallels to the story are collected in Anālayo 2011: I 173.

yobbanena samannāgato paṭhamena vayasā akāmakānaṃ mātāpitunnaṃ assumukhānaṃ rudantānaṃ kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajiṃ, MN I 163,27–31). In the later lives of the Buddha, his father opposes the Bodhisatva's plans to become an ascetic and tries to keep him at home as his successor and future king, with his mother missing altogether because she was supposed to have died after giving birth (see above).[32] However, in the older version both parents are alive and both are against their son's plans. No miracles accompany his departure as yet: there are no gods who prevent his horse from making any noise. Again this old description contradicts later biographies, and therefore may be the memory of the event as the Buddha recalled his own youth. On the other hand, the fact that the Bodhisatva left home as a young man is confirmed in all biographies.

It is easy to see why the Buddha picked out exactly these two events of his early life and communicated them to his monks. For both were turning points on his path to enlightenment. Other details concerning his youth including his birth or the name of his mother were irrelevant for his teaching.

Again following the chronology of the Buddha's life, the next episode to be considered is the enlightenment itself. Although it is very likely that the place of enlightenment was known to or at least remembered by all early monks, it does not help when trying to decide whether the Buddha was a historical person or not. At any rate, the description of Uruvelā as a *senā-nigama* "the settling down of an army" supports the assumption of genuine memory rather than a construction *ex post*. For, it is hard to imagine why particularly in this peaceful religious context an army camp should have been chosen by a later tradition as an unusually quiet place which is described in the *Ariyapariyesanasuttanta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*

[32] The earliest version mentioning the early death of the Buddha's mother and Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī as his stepmother is 142 *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅgasuttanta*: *bahūpakārā bhante Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī bhagavato mātucchā āpadikā posikā khīrassa dāyikā bhagavantaṃ janettiyā kālakatāya thaññaṃ pāyesi*, MN III 253,21 = Vin II 255,1; cf. Anālayo 2016 [reviewed by v. Hinüber 2019], chapter 3.3, pp. 72ff. on this text and on parallel versions. The earliest parallel version was published by I. Strauch (2014 [reviewed by Bailey 2015; Wilson 2016], particularly p. 28, and Strauch 2017).

in the following words: "Searching for the best place of perfect tranquillity … I approached Uruvelā, an army camp" (*anuttaraṃ santivarapadaṃ pariyesamāno magadhesu anupubbena cārikaṃ caramāno yena uruvelā senānigamo tad avasariṃ*, MN I 166,35–37). The later tradition reinterprets *senā-nigama* as *senanī-gāma* "the village of a general," that is, Sujātā's father in the post-canonical story.[33]

More interesting and more promising is the meeting of the newly awakened Buddha with the Ājīvika Upaka on his way to the Dear Park at Benares in order to deliver his first discourse. The well-known story is told twice, in the *Ariyapariyesanasuttanta* in the *Majjhimanikāya* and again at the beginning of the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinayapiṭaka*. When the Ājīvika Upaka sees the Buddha, he asks: "Sir,[34] your faculties are clear, very pure is the colour of your skin, shining bright. Under whom have you gone forth, sir? Or who is you teacher? Or whose Dharma do you profess?" (after Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*vipasannāni kho te āvuso indriyāni, parisuddho chavivaṇṇo pariyodāto. kaṃ si tvaṃ āvuso uddissa pabbajito, ko vā te satthā, kassa vā tvaṃ dhammaṃ rocesi*, MN I 170,35–171,1 = Vin I 8,13–15). The answer of the Buddha is given in four vigorous and spirited verses praising himself as the highest teacher (*ahaṃ satthā anuttaro*, MN I 171,9* = Vin I 8,23*) who has reached enlightenment without the help of any other. Therefore he professes only his own Dhamma and he plans to start doing so in Kāśī in order to "beat the drum proclaiming the cessation of death in a totally blind world"[35] (*andhabhūtasmiṃ lokasmiṃ āhañch' amatadundubhiṃ*, MN I 171,12* [*āhañchaṃ*] = Vin I 8,26* [*āhañhi*]).

Most revealing is the reaction of the Ājīvika Upaka, who is not at all impressed, at least in the Theravāda tradition. For, he reacts to the Buddha's enthusiasm with the rather dry remark "This may well be so, sir," or as the text says: "After this had been said, the Ājīvika Upaka said 'Maybe, sir' shook his head, took a wrong path and departed" (*evaṃ vutte Upako ājīvika hupeyya āvuso ti vatvā sīsaṃ okampetvā ummaggaṃ*

[33] This re-interpretation of *senānigama* is discussed in v. Hinüber forthcoming. – Cf. also Bareau [1980] 1995.

[34] This translation of *āyuṣmant-* is particularly appropriate if the etymology is considered: Latin *senior* > English *sir*.

[35] On the meaning of °-*bhūta*: v. Hinüber 2008: 14, n. 35.

gahetvā pakkami, Vin I 8,30ff. [*hupeyya*] = MN I 171,17ff. = II 93 [both *huveyya*]).

Surprisingly, this plain and simple sentence needs some comment. For, problems appear once the usual translations into modern western languages are compared and examined. The latest translation is perhaps that of the *Majjhimanikāya* by Bhikkhu Bodhi who says: "When this was said, the Ājīvika Upaka said: 'May it be so, friend.' Shaking his head he took a bypath and departed."

At the beginning, two minor points need clarification, namely the exact meaning of *sīsaṃ okampetvā* and *ummagga*. The latter is usually translated as "bypath" or "different road" (I. B. Horner, Vin-trsl., MN-trsl.) or "ein anderer Weg" (Oldenberg [1922] 1993: 93). However, after checking any Sanskrit or Pāli dictionary it is quite clear that *ummagga* means only "wrong path," or *amaggo*, Spk III 64,18ff. as Buddhaghosa glosses this word. Second, it is not entirely clear what exactly is meant by *okampetvā*. For, the word occurs in Pāli only in this phrase, which is sometimes enlarged in other contexts: "When this was said, Māra the evil one shook his head wagged his tongue, and raised his eyebrows until his forehead was puckered in three lines. Then he departed leaning on his stick" (after Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*evaṃ vutte*, *māro pāpimā sīsaṃ okampetvā jivhaṃ nillāletvā tivisākhaṃ nalāṭe nalāṭikaṃ vuṭṭhāpetvā daṇḍam olubbha pakkāmi*, SN I 118,1ff.). Bhikkhu Bodhi rightly points out this is an "expression of frustration and bewilderment," and as such obviously an idiom (MN-trsl., p. 1204, n. 228).

As *okampetvā* is only attested in this form and is always embedded in this idiom it is difficult to decide whether the *Samantapāsādikā* on the *Vinayapiṭaka* is right, where *sīsaṃ okampetvā* is explained as *sīsaṃ cāletvā*, Sp 964,27 "moving the head," or the *Sāratthappakāsinī* on the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, which has "*okampetvā* means bending down touching the chest with his jaw (chin)" (*okampetvā ti hanukena uram paharanto adhonataṃ katvā*, Spk I 182,1ff. ad SN I 118,1; cf. CPD s. v. *o-kampeti*). In contrast to the Vinaya commentary this explanation takes into account the pre-verb *ava-* > *o-*.[36] Probably the idiom and the complete phrase

[36] There does not seem to be any Sanskrit equivalent **ava-kamp* and the *Comprehensive and Critical Dictionary of the Prakrit Languages* (Ghatage et al. 2010–2011), vol. V,

should be translated rather as "Upaka hung his head and took the wrong way," that is, he was totally confused.

Although the clear and simple meaning of the optative *huveyya*/ *hupeyya* used by Upaka in his reply does not pose any difficulties, modern translations vary considerably. One of the earlier, if not the earliest translation of the Vinaya paragraph by H. Oldenberg (1854–1920) in the "Vinaya Texts" in the Sacred Books of the East series published in 1881 has "it may be so,"[37] which is correct. However, the translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi of 2001 quoted above is "May it be so" which means something quite different, almost the opposite. However, this translation is hardly correct. Oldenberg's translation expresses doubt and is in accordance with the meaning of the optative; the second translation signals consent. It seems to follow the Theravāda explanation in both, *Samantapāsādikā* and *Papañcasūdanī* "exactly thus it should be" (*hupeyya āvuso ti evam api nāma bhaveyya*, Ps II 189,20 = Sp 964,25ff.).[38] Here, however, *evam api nāma* is added, and that changes the meaning. A translation "May it be so" would presuppose a text reading *bhavatu* or *hotu* rather.

In between both these extremes there are various translations which are discussed in a useful note by I. B. Horner (1896–1981).[39] The most extreme position is the one taken by C. A. F. Rhys Davids (1857–1942), who saw in the harmless *huveyya* "a glaring imperfect misrepresentation" of what is intended, because in her opinion the text was heavily manipulated.

The embarrassment by some, particularly Buddhist translators, mirrored by the attempts to avoid a plain and straightforward translation, is as obvious as the reason for it. The Ājīvika Upaka is the first person after the enlightenment to whom the Buddha talks about his achievement. Every Buddhist expects of course that a person who had the unbelievably good luck to be the first human being ever to be able to profit from the

lists under *okaṃpiya* only one fairly recent reference (*sīs' okaṃpiya*) from a verse-commentary (Śāntisūri: *Ceiyavandanabhāsa*, 11/12th century?), which does not help.

37 Rhys Davids and Oldenberg [1881] 1965: 91. How both translators divided the text between themselves is described by C. A. F. Rhys Davids in Horner 1938 [2014]: LXI.

38 CPD I s.v. *api* Bnδ p. 291a "perhaps even" (on Ps II 189,20).

39 Horner 1951: 12, n. 6.

Buddha's newly acquired knowledge would praise him enthusiastically and accept his teaching. However, exactly the opposite happens. Upaka remains sceptical, which was hard to digest for later Buddhists, but is a strong indication of genuine memory. The Buddha is not immediately successful and does not immediately convince persons with whom he converses. Therefore, a Buddhist translator such as Bhikkhu Bodhi follows the commentarial tradition, which twists the meaning and turns a statement intended to be negative into a positive one: "May it be so."[40]

The problems of Buddhists with this episode are by no means limited to present times. The parallels are revealing, particularly those which are extant in the original Indian wording.[41] Some later sources are still very close to the Theravāda text. The Sanskrit *Saṃghabhedavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins only replaces *huveyya* when Upagu (as he is called in this tradition) says "*syād āyuṣman*" but the text adds and continues "Maybe the venerably Gautama is a Jina. Having said this the Ājīvika Upagu lost his way" (*syād āyuṣman Gautama jinaḥ. ity uktvā Upagur ājīviko mārgād apakrāntaḥ*, SBV I 132,25). This is the reading of the Gilgit manuscript. However, the editor strongly distorts the text when he corrects this wording into ***sādhv*** *āyuṣman Gautamna jinaḥ* following the Tibetan translation, which has *legs-so* = *sādhu*. The Tibetan translation is another early case of converting doubt into consent (Gnoli 1977: 132, n. 5).

When Ernst Waldschmidt (1897–1985) edited the Turfan fragments of the *Catuṣpariṣatsūtra* he also reconstructed his text following the Tibetan, because the *Saṃghabhedavastu* was not yet edited, as *sādhu āyuṣman Gautama vadasīty upaga ājīviko mārge prakrāntaḥ* "'You are speaking well, Gautama.' Saying this, the Ājīvika Upaga followed his way" (Waldschmidt 1957: § 10.11, p. 132). However, G. v. Simson pointed out in a personal communication that a small fragment of this paragraph survives which was not used by E. Waldschmidt: [*lokavi*](*ṣa*)*ktikām sy*[*ād*].[42] These traces point to a wording corresponding to the Gilgit

[40] Bhikkhu Anālayo seems to hide the embarrassing wording of Upaka's answer in a footnote and buries it under one line of bibliographical reference in his careful comparative investigation *A Comparative Study of the Majjhima-nikāya* (2011: I 184, n. 214).

[41] The relevant material has been conveniently collected by Bareau (1963: 155–160).

[42] This fragment is published in Waldschmidt 1963: 48, plate CXXVb.

Saṃghabhedavastu (… *lokaviṣaktikām syād āyuṣman* …). Consequently, Waldschmidt's reconstruction needs correction here.

Unsurprisingly, Yijing simply suppressed this embarrassing paragraph by omitting the Upaka-story altogether from his Vinaya translation as indicated by E. Waldschmidt.

A similar strategy is followed by the Mahāsāṃghikalokottaravādins in the *Mahāvastu*. The Buddha answers Upaka's question about where he is heading by pointing out that he is on his way to Benares. After these verses the conversation abruptly ends. Upaka disappears from the scene without any further utterance and the story continues with a verse spoken by the gods and an invitation of the Buddha by the Nāga Sudarśana (Mvu III 327,4–13).

In the *Lalitavistara*, on the other hand, the story ends with an anonymous Ājīvika either saying, following the Tibetan translation and some of S. Lefman's (1831–1912) manuscripts, "'Then I shall go.' Having said that, the Ājīvika proceeded to the south but the Tathāgata went to the north" (*tad bhaviṣyasi* [v. l. *gamiṣyāmi* /°-*si*] *Gautama ity uktvā sa ājīvika dakṣiṇāmukhaḥ prakrāman tathāgato 'pi uttarāmukhaḥ prākrāmat*, LV 406,16ff.), or, if we follow S. Lefman's edition "That you shall be." The reading *bhaviṣyasi*, however, may be a distant echo of Pāli *huveyya*. Be this as it may, the Tibetan translation and some Sanskrit manuscripts elegantly circumnavigate the embarrassing doubts expressed by Upaka.[43]

From this evidence it is clear that a story felt to be inappropriate was gradually toned down or simply suppressed in the course of the textual history. Although this seems to be fairly obvious, A. Bareau (1921–1993) calls the Upaka episode a late invention intruding into the text with the intention to create the opportunity to insert some verses spoken by the Buddha (Bareau 1963: 160). This slightly bizarre assumption reverses the development sketched above and makes the Theravāda version one of the youngest. However, A. Bareau, strangely enough, pays no attention at all the wording of the Pāli text. The use of the optative *huveyya*,

[43] This embarrassing scene is very rarely depicted in Buddhist art (Zin 2018, particularly pp. 152ff.; it is my pleasure to thank the author for drawing my attention to these images).

occurring only here in Pāli and in Buddhist literature, at once recalls the optative *huvevu* and *huveyāti* used in the Dhauli version of the Aśokan inscriptions and the optative *huveyya* listed as a Paiśācī form by Hemacandra (cf. Mittelindisch § 100, 457). This very simple observation shows that Pāli *huveyya* is very old as well, and, in the light of the Aśokan inscriptions, an eastern optative. Consequently, the wording is old because it is next to impossible that *huveyya* could be invented at a later date. This concurs with the future *āhañchiṃ* quoted above which also indicates a high age of this paragraph.[44] Finally a third archaism is preserved in the last verse spoken by the Buddha:

> *jitā me pāpakā dhammā tasmāhaṃ Upaka jino*, Vin I. 8,29* = MN I 171,15
> I have vanquished all evil states. Therefore, Upaka, I am a victor (Bhikkhu Bodhi).

The verse as printed by H. Oldenberg in his edition of the Vinaya does not scan; V. Trenckner (1824–1891) has noticed that and correctly inserted *Upakā jino* in the *Majjhimanikāya*. This vocative ending in a long -*ā* is of course a *pluti* and as such one of the peculiarities of the Vedic language that survive, if very rarely, in Pāli.[45] Thus, all these linguistic features suggest that this episode is certainly old. Moreover, this is corroborated by the content. For it is not easy to imagine that this failure of the Buddha to convince the Ājīvika was "invented" at an early date. If it was not, it might have been the Buddha himself who admitted that he did not convince everybody at the very beginning.

However, as seems to have been overlooked so far, this "failure" is in accordance with the hesitation expressed by the Buddha before he begins to teach because he considered his message as too difficult and comprehensible only to a few. So, how should Upaka have the intellectual vigour to grasp the true meaning of the verses spoken by the Buddha? In this context it is certainly not by chance that Upaka is an Ājīvika, a member of a rival sect that is one of those which continued to adhere to the

[44] This form is partly hidden behind distorted variants, because the word was not understood by scribes: *āhañcham̩*, MN I 171,12*; *āhañhi*, Vin I 8,26*, cf. Mittelindisch § 474.

[45] Cf. Strunk 1983, reviewed by Bodewitz (1988) and Klein (1991).

"heretical" view of Makkhali Gosāla although the true Dharma had appeared with the Buddha.[46]

So far these tiny bits of what seems to be personal memories of the Buddha communicated to and piously preserved by the early monks, although they do not concur with the image of the Buddha presented in later sources.

Lastly, two small points can be added from the very detailed description of the death of the Buddha in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*. The first is the name of the Buddha's last meal which contributed his death. This famous dish is called *sūkaramaddava* in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*. Even after many attempts ancient and modern to explain the second part of the compound, the meaning of *maddava* remains unknown. The simple reason is most likely that *maddava* might be an old and genuine name of a local dish being based on *sūkara* "pork" and *maddava* that is remembered here.[47] If so, the meaning of the compound could get lost easily.

In addition and besides this word, the structure of the text might point to an early date of composition.[48] The story is told in prose and repeated in a *triṣṭubh*-verse, which indicates a high age:

> *bhuttassa ca sūkaramaddavena / vyādhi ppabāḷhā udapādi satthu*{*no*}, DN II 128,9*
> When he had eaten, from the †truffles in the food† / there fell upon the teacher sickness dire (T. W. Rhys Davids).[49]

Again there are various strong indications of an old memory: who would and could invent at a later time in an environment preferring vegetarianism the name of a dish obviously containing meat consumed by the Buddha?

[46] It is an interesting symmetry that the last monk ordained by the Buddha himself shortly before his death is also a "heretic," the *paribbājaka* Subhadda. This time, however, and in contrast to Upaka, Subhadda is immediately convinced by the Buddha and praises Ānanda: *lābhā vo āvuso Ānanda*, … *ye ettha satthārā sammukhā antevāsābhisekena abhisittā*, DN II 152,34–36: The wording *antevāsābhisekena abhisittā* occurs only here and is obviously non-Buddhist language used to characterize a follower of a different school.

[47] On the various modern attempts to interpret the word *sūkaramaddava* cf. v. Hinüber 2000; traditional Buddhist explications of the Buddha's disease are discussed by Strong (2012).

[48] On this text structure cf. Alsdorf 1968: 60ff.

[49] Oldenberg [1922] 1993: 151: "wie er des Ebers weiches Fleisch genossen, heftiger Krankheit Schmerzen ihn befielen."

A second detail is interesting because of the traditional interpretation of the event. Shortly before his death the Buddha almost chases away the monk Upavāṇa, who is fanning him: "Go away monk, do not stand in front of me!" (*Upavāṇaṃ apasādesi*: *apehi*, *bhikkhu*, *mā me purato aṭṭhāsi*, DN II 138,27). When Ānanda almost reproaches the Buddha because of this most unfriendly remark, the latter explains that Upavāṇa stands in the way of the gods, who want to see the Buddha for a last time. This is aptly interpreted by P. Harrison in the following words:

> This strikes me as a rather feeble attempt to cover up for a perfectly understandable moment of grouchiness on the part of a sick old man … It is one of those rare moments in a sacred biography when the veil of piety is twitched aside and we catch a glimpse of a real human being.[50]

A third detail preserved only in the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* could be considered as immediate memory. Shortly before the Buddha speaks his famous last words "Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence!" (T. D. Rhys Davids) (*vayadhammā saṃkhārā appamādena sampādethā ti ayaṃ tathāgatassa pacchimā vācā*, DN II 156,1ff.) the Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions insert: "Then the Lord removed his upper garment completely from his body and addressed the monks: 'Take a look at the body of the Tathāgata, monks. Take a look at the body of the Tathāgata, monks'" (*atha bhagavān svakāyād uttarāsaṅgam ekānte vivṛtya bhikṣūn āmantrayate*: *avalokayata bhikṣavas tathāgatasya kāyam*. *avalokayata bhikṣavas tathāgatasya kāyam*, MPS § 42,9ff.).[51] The reason for this exhortation given in the text itself is the extremely rare opportunity to see a Tathāgata, rare as the blossom of an *udumbara* flower. However, E. Waldschmidt is certainly right when he points out in his investigations on the tradition of the end of the Buddha's life:

[50] Harrison 1995, particularly pp. 13ff. – The same strategy to tone down an embarrassing tradition is used in later sources in order to suppress the words of an old monk (*mahallaka*) who rejoices after the Buddha's death, because he finally feels free from all the many prescriptions: only Mahākāśyapa, but no other monk, hears this *akālabhāṣya* because of the interference of the gods (Waldschmidt 1951: 422, § 48.11, cf. DN II 162,26–32).

[51] Waldschmidt 1951: 393ff.

> It seems to me that the historical core is that the Buddha wished to demonstrate the decay of every human being to his monks, even of his own body. Only later, when the Buddha transcended human nature and when eternal beauty was attributed to his body, the meaning of this act was understood in a different way, if it was not suppressed altogether.[52]

Besides these details which underline the existence of the Buddha as a historical person, it should be kept also in mind that numerous persons witnessed the Buddha entering Nirvāṇa, if we take the fairly early text at face value. There were monks, laymen and laywomen, but no nuns, which is another indication that this is an early text (cf. Hinüber 2008: 22 with n. 60). Monks are mentioned by names, first of all Anuruddha and Ānanda, who are the first to speak after the gods Brahmā and Śakra immediately after the death of the Buddha. Then there are the Mallas of Kusinārā who were certainly a community that really existed: the Mallas are mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and in the Purāṇas.

It has been stated frequently and rightly that the extant sources are best for the end of the life of the Buddha, an event which inscribed itself deeply into the collective memory of the early Buddhists.

When trying to evaluate the content of the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*, the first necessary step is again to investigate the probable date of the composition. This has been done elsewhere, and only a few points need to be repeated here.[53] There are indications that the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* was composed before the accession of Candragupta Maurya and before the beginnings of the Mauryan Empire. This is very likely because the foundation of the later Maurya capital Pāṭaliputta is mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta* without linking it to the Maurya or any other dynasty, but only to commerce by calling it a *puṭabhedana* a "customs

[52] Waldschmidt [1939] 1967 and again in Waldschmidt 1948: 248: "… schien sich mir folgender historischer Kern der Vorgänge in der Todesstunde des Buddha zu ergeben: Der Buddha nahm von seinen Jüngern Abschied, indem er seinen Körper vor ihnen entblößte und ihnen die Vergänglichkeit alles Irdischen am Verfall seines eigenen Körpers vor Augen führte. Er schloß dann mit einer Ermahnung, sich um Vervollkommnung zu bemühen, für immer die Augen. Dieser menschlich ergreifende Vorgang wurde später, als man das Leben des Buddha über irdische Maßstäbe hinaushob und seinem Körper unvergängliche Schönheit zuschrieb, umgedeutet." – Cf. also Powers 2009, reviewed by Collett 2010 and Ciurtin 2010–2011.

[53] v. Hinüber 2006 [2009], particularly pp. 202ff.

station" as demonstrated by B. Kölver (1985). Moreover, when the relics of the Buddha are distributed, only the Moriyas of Pipphalivana are mentioned, not the imperial Mauryas. This is another detail that indicates a pre-Mauryan date of at least part of the material preserved in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*. Therefore, it is not easy to conceive how all the events told in this long text, especially the many persons including the Mallas, could have been invented at such an early date, most likely only a few decades after the death of the Buddha in about 380 and the accession of Candragupta Maurya in about 320 BC, when the end of the Buddha's life was still living memory for many persons. As long as the date of the composition falls within the range of possible living memory, it is hard to imagine how the description of such an event stretching over many days if not weeks could be accepted as reality by persons living at Kusinārā and elsewhere as still living witnesses (or possible witnesses) or as immediate descendants of witnesses, if all this never happened.

Moreover, D. Drewes' statement that the Buddha "has not been linked to any historical fact" (Drewes 2017: 1) is hardly tenable. The Mallas are there, many Kings (cf. Bareau 1993) are mentioned, and the foundation of Pāṭaliputta is referred to. All this is historical context. And the Buddha talks to and about the heretics, first of all the Nighaṇṭha Nāthaputta or Mahāvīra and his teachings. Almost nothing of the "heretical" texts survive with the exception of those of the Jains, which unsurprisingly do not mention the Buddha, or any other heretic besides Mahāvīra's former pupil, the founder of the Ājīvikas, Makkhali Gosāla. If, on the other hand, the Buddha was "invented," the Ājīvikas and other heretics are in danger to disappear from history together with him.

A paragraph in many respects of particular importance and interest in the context of the relation of the Buddha to heretics is a discussion in the 71 *Tevijjavacchagottasuttanta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, to which Bhikkhu Anālayo recently drew attention. He translates the relevant text as follows (Anālayo 2014: 119, n. 68): "Those who speak like this: the recluse Gotama is omniscient and all-seeing, he claims to have complete knowledge and vision … they are not speaking what has been said by me, they are misrepresenting me with what is untrue and false" (*ye … evaṃ ahaṃsu*: *samaṇo Gotamo sabbaññū sabbadassāvī aparisesaṃ*

ñāṇadassanaṃ paṭijānāti … [omitted: *carato ca me tiṭṭhato ca suttassa ca jāgarassa ca satataṃ samitaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paccupaṭṭhitan*] … *na me te vuttavādino*, *abbhācikkhanti ca pana maṃ te asatā abhūtenā ti*, MN I 482,14–18).

The conclusion from this paragraph seems to be more than obvious, in Anālayo's own words (2014: 119): "The Buddha explicitly denied having ever made a claim to omniscience, clarifying that to attribute such a claim to him amounts to misrepresentation. No parallel to this discourse appears to be known."

However, the important middle part of the quotation is left out, which says: "whether I am walking or standing or sleeping or awake knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to me" (Bhikkhu Bodhi). If this sentence is taken into account the interpretation changes considerably. For, as Bhikkhu Bodhi remarks (MN-tr. n. 713), this refers to the position of the Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta: "The Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta is omniscient and all-seeing and claims to have complete knowledge and vision thus: …" (Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*nigaṇṭho nāthaputto sabaññū sabbadassāvī* …, MN I 92,35–93,1). Then follows the sentence left out by Bhikkhu Anālayo stating that he knows everything at any time and at the same time. Only this is rejected by the Buddha: "There is no recluse or Brahmin who knows all, who sees all, simultaneously; that is not possible" (Bhikkhu Bodhi) (*natthi so samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā yo sakid-eva sabbañ ñassati sabbaṃ dakkhiti*, *n'etaṃ ṭhāṇaṃ vijjati*, MN II 127,29ff.; AN II 24,29–26,2; Mil 102,4–107,26). Thus the Buddha does not reject his being omniscient, but being omniscient in a particular way.

For the Buddha explicitly rejects the claim that he possesses omniscience (like Mahāvīra claims) of all and everything in one moment. The Buddha contrasts his *tevijja* to this and says that "by my divine eye I see past lives" (1. *pubbenivāsa*), "beings passing away and reappearing" (2. *satte passāmi cavamāne uppajjamāne*), "taintless deliverance of the mind and deliverance by wisdom after the destruction of taints" (3. *āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttim paññāvimuttiṃ sacchikatvā*, MN I 482,30–36) (after Bhikkhu Bodhi).[54]

[54] Later sources expand that to *sabbaññutā*: *sabbadhammesu Buddhassa bhagavato ñāṇaṃ pavattati*. *sabbe dhammā Buddhassa* …*āvajjanapaṭibaddhā* …, Nidd I 179,13ff.

The description of the omniscience of the Nigganṭha Nāthaputta concurs with Jain ideas as pointed out in a careful study of this text by Padmanabh Shivram Jaini.[55] An important point is that this description though factually correct is not a quotation from any Jain text. Therefore, it might reflect a fairly early, if not contemporary dispute between Jains and Buddhists that is referred to here.[56]

Moreover, as Anālayo notes, there is no parallel to this paragraph from the *Tevijjavacchagottasuttanta* in other Buddhist traditions. The reason may be that with an evolving Buddhology creating a truly omniscient Buddha there was no longer room for any disclaimer of the Buddha in this respect, not even of any particular form of omniscience. This can be seen quite clearly in Buddhaghosa's comment on this paragraph, who says that, because part of the statement is wrong, the Buddha rejects all of it even though he is omniscient,[57] which clearly means that the Buddha rejected the Jain view (as he does more often in the Tipiṭaka), but not his own omniscience. Consequently, the fate of this paragraph only preserved in the Theravāda tradition is somewhat similar to that of the Upaka episode. Lastly, both texts would sit very uncomfortably in an invented environment, because both do not proclaim the greatness of the founder of Buddhism, but quite on the contrary emphasize his being truly human.

To sum up: There are not many, but some texts in the Tipiṭaka which may well contain ancient, if not personal memories of the Buddha, and which would be hard to explain, if the Buddha was "invented." These are casual remarks or unexpected statements such as the Buddha's failure

– The term *tevijjā* is used by the Buddha here is certainly not a random choice. For, *tevijjā* is also the knowledge of the Veda, and he probably contrasts his wisdom not only to that of the Nigaṇṭha Nāthaputta but perhaps also to that of the Brahmins against whose superficial knowledge of the texts of the three Vedas he sets his much deeper vision.

55 Jaini [1974] 2001, cf. also Endo 2016.

56 Cf. Anālayo 2014: 119, n. 69: "we ought probably to admit this *sūtra* as an authentic part of the earliest *Tripiṭaka*" quoting A. K. Warder (1924–2013).

57 *na me ti ananuññāya ṭhatvā anuññaṃ pi paṭikkhipati. sabbaññū sabbadassāvī aparisesaṃ ñāṇadassanaṃ paṭijānātī ti hi idaṃ anujānitabbaṃ siyā. carato ca me … pe …paccupaṭṭhitan ti idaṃ pana nānujānitabbaṃ sabbaññutañāṇena hi āvajjitvā va jānāti. tasmā ananuññāya ṭhatvā anuññaṃ pi paṭikkhipanto evam āha*, Ps III 195,19–26.

to impress the Ājīvika Upaka. If this is accepted, this is at least in part the memory a historical person, the Buddha.[58]

Moreover, if the Buddha was "invented," all his early disciples must have been invented as well as pointed out, e.g., by J. Filliozat in his contribution to *L'Inde classique* quoted above, and that at a fairly early date. For at least Anuruddha, who was present at the Nirvāṇa according to the *Mahāparanibbānasuttanta*, is mentioned already in the Deorkothar inscription about 200–150 BC explicitly as an *antevāsin* of the Buddha.[59] Still a bit earlier, relics of Mahāmogallāna and Sāriputta were deposited at Sāñcī (Willis 2000: 14, reviewed by v. Hinüber, 2001b).

Therefore, it seems possible to accept J. W. de Jong's conclusion on the historicity of the Buddha with confidence:

> Kern's (1833–1917) extreme view, which went so far as to deny the existence of the historical Buddha altogether, has not found any followers, but Senart's (1847–1928) theory has continued to exercise a fascination on later scholars, even though most of them followed in Oldenberg's footsteps. It has become customary to oppose Senart's mythological method to Oldenberg's rationalistic and euhemeristic method. Foucher … declares that in Senart's Buddha the human being is absent, but in the one described by Oldenberg, the god. … The important point in Senart's work is the fact that he based his position upon the conceptions that the Indians had of the Buddha. Their reality is not the historical reality as conceived by nineteenth century scholars (de Jong [1974] 1997: 31ff.).

Indeed, the historical reality, though always the same, is differently perceived and described. In ancient India it was inconceivable to relate the life of a great man like the Buddha without any mythological superstructure. This must be kept in mind, when the ancient Indian texts are read: they present reality in a way of their own and cannot but clad the messages they want to convey in a mythological garb.

This was very aptly formulated by E. Frauwallner (1898–1974) in a brief contribution already in 1957:

[58] Cf. "It is unlikely that a religious tradition will go so far as to invent stories that put its founder in a bad light … It is more likely that a memory of real accidents and setbacks in the founder's life was preserved" (Harrison 1995: 12).

[59] [*bhagavato budhasa sakamunisa*] (*ā*)*tevāsi anurudho* (Skilling and v. Hinüber 2013).

> Nevertheless, this tradition supplies our enquiry with serviceable elements, provided one is not excessively exigent. Those who refuse to give credence to the tradition until a diary kept by Ānanda has been found, duly authenticated by the authorities of Rājagṛha and Vaiśālī, will have long to wait. They may pride themselves on the strictness of their method, but they will be forced to admit that such systems would paralyze all scientific inquiry.[60]

Keeping the sound advice by J. W. de Jong and E. Frauwallner in mind while reading the sources always having a keen eye on their language not only allows doing justice to both the mythology and to the facts which the texts communicate, but also allows consenting to the very last sentence of the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*: *evam etaṃ bhūtapubbaṃ*, DN II 167,21 "Thus it was in the days of yore."

Primary Sources and Abbreviations

Note: All references to Pāli texts are to the PTS editions.

AN	*Aṅguttaranikāya*
ARIRIAB	*Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University.*
Buddha-c	Aśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita*, ed. E. H. Johnston. Calcutta 1935–1936.
CPD	*Critical Pāli Dictionary*; see Trenckner, Andersen and Smith 1924–1992.
DN	*Dīghanikāya*
HPL	O. v. Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*; see Hinüber 1996.
Ja	*Jātaka*
Kv	*Kathāvatthu*
LV	*Lalitavistara*
Mittelindisch	O. v. Hinüber, *Das ältere Mittelindisch*; see Hinüber 2001a.
Mil	*Milindapañha*
MN	*Majjhimanikāya*
MN-trsl.	*Majjhimanikāya*; translation by Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (2001).
MPS	*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*; see Waldschmidt 1951.
Mvu	*Mahāvastu*

[60] Frauwallner [1957] 1982. Why this ironic statement is called "exasperate" by Drewes (2017: 16), whose abbreviated quote slightly distorts Frauwallner's words, is a bit puzzling.

Nidd I	*Mahāniddesa*
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī*
SBV I	*Saṃghabhedavastu*; see Gnoli 1977.
Sn	*Suttanipāta*
SN	*Saṃyuttanikāya*
Sp	*Samantapāsādikā*
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī*
Sv	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*
Vin	*Vinayapiṭaka*
Vin-trsl.	*Vinayapiṭaka*; translation by Horner (1938, 1951).

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ABSTRACT

In an article published in this journal (40.2017 [2018]), entitled "The Idea of the Historical Buddha," David Drewes reviewed the opinions of a number of western Buddhologists on whether or not the Buddha was a historical person and in conclusion claimed that the Buddha never existed. As D. Drewes exclusively draws on secondary literature to demonstrate his point, it seems worthwhile to go back to the sources in order to evaluate their age and to trace possibly early texts containing information on the biography of the Buddha. In doing so, the literary form of early Buddhist texts is taken into consideration and linguistic arguments are used to determine their relative chronology. If texts show traces pointing to an early date fairly near to the assumed life time of the Buddha, this might either indicate the historical existence or at least the date of the creation of the person called the Buddha. Moreover, details preserved in ancient texts which contradict later Buddha biographies are pointed out in order to trace possible memories of a genuine person.